

Daily Herald, June 6, 2006

Condell Medical Center announced plans Monday to seek Level I trauma status, which would allow the hospital to treat all trauma patients in Lake County.

Currently, the Libertyville center's Level II status means severely injured patients — about 300 per year — have to be taken to Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge or Froedtert Memorial Hospital near Milwaukee, Wis.

"We are growing and Lake County residents need this next level of service," Condell President and Chief Executive Officer Dennis Millirons said. Existing treatment bays will more than double from 25 to 53 when the expanded Trauma I emergency department is completed, he said.

Condell officials made the announcement standing in front of the 3-year-old Emergency Room building.

About 100 people were in attendance including local politicians, media and hospital staff members.

The \$25 million proposal still is a long way from becoming a reality.

The first step is to receive approval from the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board.

Condell has submitted a proposal to the planning board for a 68-bed medical/surgical expansion, including the emergency room improvements. Plans also include the addition of a 90-bed/90-room patient tower. A hearing is planned for July in Springfield on the proposed patient tower. In September, the planning board will hear testimony on the expansion proposal.

Millirons hopes construction on both projects will begin in early 2007 and be completed in 2009.

Once the project is finished, Condell will have to add about 300 staff members with the expansions, Millirons said.

The key difference between a Level I and Level II trauma designation is Level I has a surgeon available 24-hours a day. With Level II, surgeons have 30 minutes to get to the hospital.

Dr. Mark Kadowaki, Condell trauma director, said the first hour — or "golden hour" — following a patient's injuries is the most crucial.

"Right now, a large amount of that time is being spent providing transportation to another county," Kadowaki said. "In my opinion, this is a service the community needs."

Condell's emergency room visits grew more than 14 percent from 2004 to 2005. They are expected to increase about 7 percent this year. Hospital officials expect to see 55,000 emergency room patients this year.

Condell has only recently expressed interest in obtaining Level I status. In 2004, Condell officials said they didn't see a need to upgrade because the hospital didn't transfer many patients — less than 2 percent — and mostly pediatric patients, burn victims and patients with eye injuries.

Millirons said it has been more than six years since Condell studied the need for Level I trauma, and a lot has changed in the county since then.

"In the next 10 years there are going to be over 900,000 people living in Lake County," Millirons said. "That means more freeways, more congested highways and a greater chance for multiple

trauma. We feel like this is the best care and what we need to be doing."

Condell is one of five Level II hospitals in Lake County. Highland Park Hospital, Lake Forest Hospital, Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital near Lake Barrington and Victory Memorial Hospital in Waukegan also have Level II trauma centers.

U.S. Congressman Mark Kirk, a Republican from Highland Park, said with 700,000 people living in Lake County, it is time for a top trauma center.

"The current situation makes no common sense," Kirk said. "This will not only save lives, but also drive economic development and jobs."

Libertyville Fire Chief Rich Carani said he and his colleagues are excited by this opportunity.

"As emergency responders, we know how important it is for a patient to receive the highest level of care without delay in that first hour," Carani said. "Residents will greatly benefit by having a Level I trauma center in Lake County."